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THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS AND RECENT RESEARCH.

I.

THE historical importance of the fourteenth chapter of Genesis has for a long time been recognized by scholars. It will be recalled that this chapter opens with an account of a military campaign, in which rulers of the Euphrates Valley and adjacent countries wage a war on a large scale against Syrian and Palestinian principalities.

Such is the style of the narrative, such the manner in which details regarding the course of the campaign are set forth, as to preclude the possibility of an apocryphal narrative. While there is nothing in the narrative that warrants us in assuming, as some scholars with a lively imagination have done, that the narrative embodies extracts from some Babylonian documents, translated into Hebrew, it is, on the other hand, clear that the story told must have been of sufficient importance, from a political point of view, to have impressed itself firmly upon the memory of people. Babylonian rulers, as we now know, began at a very early period to turn their attention to the conquest of the land lying to the west of the Euphrates. Their ambition appears to have been to reach the sea, and to extend their conquests from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. The Biblical ideal, therefore, which looks forward to a "Hebrew" kingdom embracing precisely this district, appears from this point of view to be Jehovah's answer given through the mouths of his prophets to Babylonia's ambition.

One of the earliest Babylonian rulers, Sargon, is referred

to in cuneiform literature as the conqueror of the "West-land," as Syria and Palestine were termed. Although this ruler becomes a legendary hero to a later age, still the fact that there is associated with him the tradition of a conquest of Syria and Palestine is significant, inasmuch as it distinctly recalls early campaigns in this direction. The great Assyrian rulers from the twelfth to the seventh century were consistently occupied in pouring their armies into the lands to the west of the Euphrates, and it now appears that they were but imitating the example set long previous by their predecessors, the rulers of ancient Babylonia. In the fifteenth century, as the letters found at El-Amarna in Egypt show, the Babylonian cuneiform characters were employed by the governors and officials in Syria, along the Phoenician coast, as well as in Palestine proper. Such a state of affairs points necessarily to an antecedent conquest, on the part of Babylonia, of the districts in question. The fourteenth chapter of Genesis preserves the tradition of this conquest. But in determining this point we are far from having solved the problems involved in the chapter. On the contrary, they now loom up more formidable than ever. Primarily, the date of the events described in the chapter must be determined, and this involves, again, the necessity of identifying some of the rulers whose names are given. Scholars have exhausted their ingenuity, and *dilettanti* their imagination, in answering these questions. The literature that has been written within the last twenty-five years about this chapter would fill a portly volume; and yet an impartial verdict must admit that but little of permanent value has been produced. There is perhaps one point that may fairly be said to be settled—the identity of Amraphel with the great conqueror Hammurabi, who succeeded in uniting the various states into which the Euphrates Valley was divided into one empire, and which from its capital at Babylon became known as Babylonia. True, the name Amraphel does not correspond exactly with

Hammurabi. The divergence, however, can be accounted for, and it must be remembered that foreign proper names are apt to be considerably distorted in passing from one people to another. The controversy, however, as to the date of Hammurabi's reign is not yet over, and, indeed, the whole question of Babylonian chronology is in a more muddled state at present than at any time in the history of cuneiform research. The period of Hammurabi may be accepted provisionally as 2200 B.C., which answers the conditions more satisfactorily than any other; but a strong emphasis should be placed upon the term "provisionally."

The association of Abram in this chapter with the great campaign of eastern rulers against western principalities is one of the stumblingblocks to a satisfactory solution of the chronological problem, and only recently Professor Hommel of Munich has discussed once more this contemporaneity of Abram and Hammurabi. Hommel is inclined now to place Abram several centuries earlier than the date commonly agreed upon by scholars. His arguments are by no means convincing, but the fact that the problem at this late day must again be taken up, may be quoted as an illustration of how little scholarship has as yet accomplished in its attempt to interpret this fourteenth chapter in the light of history. One feels strongly inclined to suspect that the introduction of Abram into this chapter is due to a confusion of names and traditions, if we assume, as indeed we must, that the narrative in its present form dates from a very late period, when distinctions between several generations, or even between several centuries, were no longer sharply defined in the minds of the people. Even we with all our historical teaching, and only three centuries removed from the Reformation, would find it difficult to differentiate between events scattered among various decades, and which appear to us as so many parts of a single picture. According to this view, it is due to a late tradition that Abram is brought into connexion with events with which he had nothing to do. Nor is

it impossible that the similarity in names between Hammurabi and Abram—a similarity more apparent if these names be transliterated into Hebrew characters—may have been a factor in bringing about the association of the two names in a dimmed historical tradition, and thus produced a blending of totally different historical periods. This suggestion, which at least merits consideration, is thrown out here as a further illustration of the great difficulties that scholars encounter when dealing with such records as are found in many portions of the Old Testament—difficulties which should make the general public less impatient to obtain definite results, and more sympathetically disposed towards the Biblical critics, whose paths are thorny enough without being made more difficult through abuse and suspicion.

II.

The general interest in the Old Testament is such that whatever light is thrown upon its records and contents from outside sources is certain of being received with great favour. This is as it should be, but it is not a healthy symptom to find a vague conviction existing in the minds of many to whom the Old Testament has a sacred significance as a record of religious revelation, that its contents require "confirmation," or at all event that "confirmation" is to be hailed with joy. Such an attitude has various decided disadvantages, chief among these being that it engenders by way of reaction an unjustifiable scepticism as to the historical value and authenticity of those portions of the Old Testament which are clearly historical. Scholarship has never encouraged such scepticism, though it has pointed out that in dealing with an ancient narrative, whether in the Old Testament or elsewhere, we must not apply modern standards of definiteness and accuracy. Worse than this, the anxiety of the public for "confirmatory" evidence offers a temptation to historians and scholars to be somewhat hasty in publishing their discoveries and views. An

illustration is furnished at present in this very chapter of Genesis under consideration.

A few years ago the scholarly world was startled by the announcement that the name of Chedor-laomer the king of Elam, associated with Amraphel the king of Shinar (i. e. Babylonia), was found on a cuneiform tablet, and what is more, in a letter addressed by the famous Hammurabi to Sin-idinnam the king of Larsa. The discovery was made by an able French scholar—Father Scheil, whose activity in cuneiform research has been most fruitful. Scheil did not publish an exact reproduction of the tablet, which is now in the Constantinople Museum, so that scholars were dependent upon his transliteration of the Babylonian characters. The name as given by Scheil was Kudur-Nukhgamar, which appeared to be sufficiently close to the Biblical Chedor-laomer to justify the identification of the two. Some scholars felt a little hesitation in accepting this result; but scarcely had Scheil's article appeared, when Professor Sayce hastened to spread the discovery through the medium of popular journals, and to draw important conclusions. Experience, which so often proved disastrous to Sayce's historical views, should have prompted him to greater care. With all his merits as a popular writer and investigator, Professor Sayce has often done harm by the rapidity with which he is apt to give to the public, tentative and provisional conjectures and shadowy possibilities, as though they were definitely ascertained facts.

Two scholars have recently had an opportunity of studying the Constantinople tablet said to contain the name of Chedor-laomer—Mr. L. W. King, assistant-keeper of the department of Assyrian Antiquities of the British Museum, and Dr. G. A. Knudtzon, a very thorough Norwegian Assyriologist. Confidence in the result of this examination is increased by the consideration that not only did King and Knudtzon work independently of one another, but the one apparently did not even know that the other was engaged in the same work.

King published his results in connexion with a most valuable publication, *Letters and Inscriptions of Hammurabi* (Luzac & Co., 1898); Knudtzon, in the first part of the fourth volume of Delitzsch and Haupt's *Beiträge zur Assyriologie*.

King's doubts as to Scheil's reading were aroused even before he came to make a study of the tablet, inasmuch as among the British Museum collections of letters of Hammurabi he found the proper name I-nukh-shamar preceded by an upright wedge, which is the common determinative for proper names. Unable to go to Constantinople, he obtained a photograph of the tablet, and satisfied himself that the individual mentioned on Scheil's tablet was the same as on the one in the British Museum. On the Constantinople tablet the determinative sign is omitted, as is frequently the case in letters of this period. It is true that Knudtzon did not recognize the characters in question as a proper name, but his reading is identical with that proposed by King, except that he was not certain as to one sign.

The revised translation proposed by King agrees entirely with the one now suggested by Professor Delitzsch of Breslau, on the basis of Knudtzon's collation, except that Delitzsch leaves the unrecognized proper name untranslated, and did not understand a word which becomes quite clear, if we adopt King's reading for one of the characters composing the word instead of Knudtzon's. The same word occurs precisely in the same form in another tablet (King's text, No. 15, line 11). There is, therefore, no reason to doubt the correctness of King's view, and the letter in question is therefore to be translated as follows:—

To Sinidinnam, speaks as follows Hammurabi—"The goddesses of Emutbal (on the border between Elam and Babylon), which are under thy control, will be brought to thee by the troops under the command of Inukhshamar. When they reach thee, then, with the troops at thy disposal, destroy the army, but bring the goddesses back to their dwelling in safety."

It will be seen that the letter refers to a campaign which

Hammurabi is waging against Elam. On a previous occasion, some of the images of the goddesses of this country must have been carried off as spoil. Hammurabi, following the policy which was frequently adopted by Babylonian monarchs, was anxious to conciliate the divine protectors of Elam by paying to the latter the proper devotion, and therefore sends these images, together with the reinforcements, through an official, and while directing Sinidinnam to destroy the army of Elam, urges him to restore the images to their proper places, and thus secure for Hammurabi the favour of these goddesses.

Shortly after Scheil's announcement of his discovery, a report was spread—largely again through the instrumentality of Professor Sayce—that the two remaining kings mentioned in the first verse of the fourteenth chapter of Genesis had also been found in cuneiform tablets, namely, Arioch the king of El-Asar, and Tidal the king of Goyim. It now appears that Mr. T. G. Pinches, somewhat previous to the publication of Scheil's article, tentatively suggested the possibility that in certain tablets of the British Museum these two kings were mentioned, but upon sending the extracts to Professor Schrader of Berlin, it turned out that the transliteration was quite problematical; and even if the readings were admitted, the context of the passages in which they occurred was so utterly obscure, owing to the fragmentary condition of the tablets in question, as to require the greatest caution in reaching any conclusions. Still, in connexion with Scheil's discovery, a good deal of popularity was given to the supposed readings, but, alas! they must also share the fate of the Chedor-laomer discovery.

No one can read Mr. King's remarks in his recent work (pp. 50–53) without feeling that there is not the slightest shadow of probability that Tudkhula (assuming the reading to be clear) is identical with the biblical Tidal, or that Eri-aku is the same as the biblical Arioch. If, in addition, it be borne in mind that these two personages are not

called kings in the cuneiform tablet, it will be seen upon what flimsy foundation the entire structure rests.

Mr. Pinches had also called attention to three passages in tablets of the British Museum, in which an individual is mentioned whose name is to be read Ku-Ku-Ku-mal or Kudur-Kumal. Since in one of these passages the name is followed by the sign for king and two characters which might be a part of the name Elam, Mr. Pinches, who appears to have set his heart upon finding Chedor-laomer, proposed an identification with the biblical personage. In order to do this, the third character, which is identical with the first and second, would have the value *lag*, for which view there is no authorization. In this way he obtained Kudur-lagmal, and comparing this with Scheil's Kudur-nukh-gamar, the slight variation, it was thought, might be overlooked.

In view of the way in which Scheil's proposition has been disposed of, it is useless to enter upon any further consideration of this last attempt to force Chedor-laomer into cuneiform literature.

III.

The question may properly be asked—What is the lesson to be drawn from this demolition of supposed facts, to which a wide publicity had been given?

Of course scholars are prone to error; and the one who prides himself upon always being right may safely be set down as one who has never discovered anything. No blame attaches to Father Scheil, who is a most conscientious and faithful worker, and to whom all scholars are under obligation for his numerous publications and most valuable researches.

Mr. Pinches, too, merits our utmost respect. Attached to the British Museum for almost a quarter of a century, there is no Assyriologist living who has published so many cuneiform texts as Mr. Pinches. Pinches, Strassmaier, and King form the trio of the most expert copyists of cuneiform

tablets. It may be that, in the case under consideration, he yielded to the temptation, to which scholars as well as others are prone, of making "wish the father to the thought"; but it is not Mr. Pinches who gave the supposed readings a sensational character. The blame for this, as for the exploitation of Scheil's discovery, rests upon others, and it is idle to conceal the fact that harm results when the public finds out that it has been misled. There will be generated a suspicion and distrust of scholarship, which is most unfortunate because utterly unjustified. Taken as a body, there is no set of scholars more careful, more cautious, more conscientious, than the oft-denounced Biblical critics and Semitists. But a large part of the blame attaches to the general public, whose interest in Old Testament questions leads to that strange longing for "confirmation" of biblical records and biblical statements upon which we have commented. It may be that the past generation of scholars encouraged this longing, but it is certain that the methods prevailing in up-to-date scholarship are totally averse to this. The same tests that are applied to the historical records of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans hold good for the Old Testament. We must avail ourselves of any light that we can secure from the outside to illumine the pages of the Old Testament. Much light has been secured in this way, and more will be, but we should remember that questions of authenticity are not at all involved in this phase of the Old Testament study.

Coming back to the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, its historical character will not be strengthened upon our finding, as we may any day, in cuneiform tablets or in other documents, the names of the kings mentioned in the first two verses. On the other hand, it is not necessary to hold our verdict in suspense about the historical character of this chapter until confirmatory evidence is obtained.

To be sure, there are many statements in the Old Testament recorded in a form given to them by popular tradition, which we must carefully study in order to deter-

mine the share to be allotted to tradition, and what portion is to be put down as definite historical fact. But even tradition is not worthless or wrong simply because it may not be accurate. The questions still remain for scholarship to answer satisfactorily—How did the tradition arise, and what is its purport?

The answer to these questions may lead to results which are more important than those which a prosaic chronicler would be apt to regard as of supreme significance. On the other hand, it is clear that, in the light of recent researches, the attitude of the general public towards biblical scholarship demands a radical change. Instead of dividing scholars into two imaginary companies—the destructive and the constructive—those persons who are unable to engage in researches for themselves should learn patience, and follow as carefully as they can, but without prejudice and without passion, the efforts of investigators to solve the many problems which the Old Testament furnishes, and which do not require “confirmation” but “illumination.”

Scholarship, on the other hand, which sets before itself any other goal but the pursuit of truth, no matter whether it leads, commits intellectual suicide. Let the public learn to distrust such persons as are constantly flourishing some “confirmation” in the face of the critics, and it will not be doomed to frequent disappointments. As for the scholars, their proper attitude toward the public is indicated in a saying which a Rabbi who was a contemporary of Jesus is reported to have made the motto of his life—“Ye wise men, be chary of your words.”

MORRIS JASTROW, Junr.